



Bad-Ass Faeries

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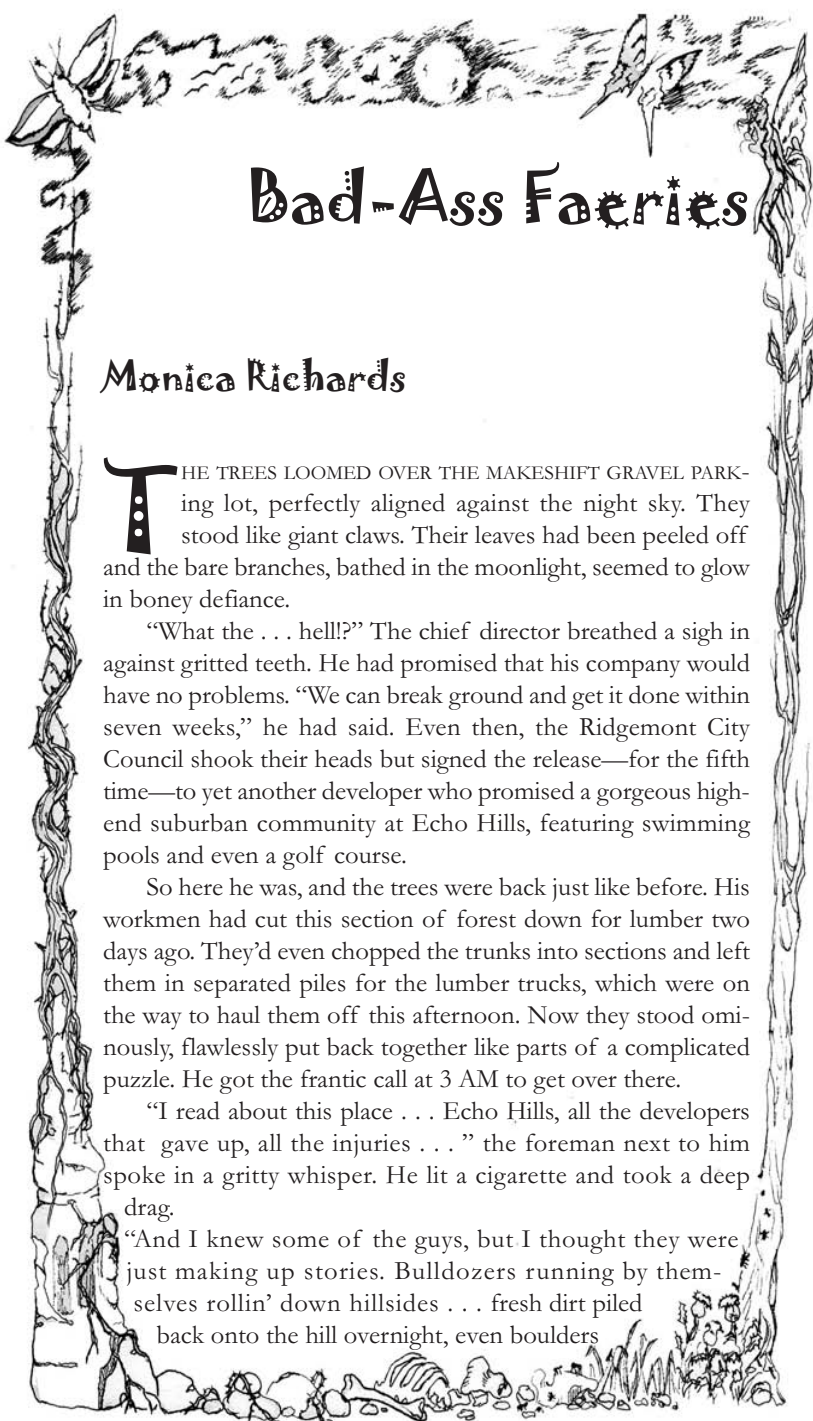
THE TREES LOOMED OVER THE MAKESHIFT GRAVEL PARKING lot, perfectly aligned against the night sky. They stood like giant claws. Their leaves had been peeled off and the bare branches, bathed in the moonlight, seemed to glow in boney defiance.

“What the . . . hell!?” The chief director breathed a sigh in against gritted teeth. He had promised that his company would have no problems. “We can break ground and get it done within seven weeks,” he had said. Even then, the Ridgemont City Council shook their heads but signed the release—for the fifth time—to yet another developer who promised a gorgeous high-end suburban community at Echo Hills, featuring swimming pools and even a golf course.

So here he was, and the trees were back just like before. His workmen had cut this section of forest down for lumber two days ago. They’d even chopped the trunks into sections and left them in separated piles for the lumber trucks, which were on the way to haul them off this afternoon. Now they stood ominously, flawlessly put back together like parts of a complicated puzzle. He got the frantic call at 3 AM to get over there.

“I read about this place . . . Echo Hills, all the developers that gave up, all the injuries . . .” the foreman next to him spoke in a gritty whisper. He lit a cigarette and took a deep drag.

“And I knew some of the guys, but I thought they were just making up stories. Bulldozers running by themselves rollin’ down hillsides . . . fresh dirt piled back onto the hill overnight, even boulders



4 • Bad-Ass Faeries

tripped by nothing but air and rolled over their cars . . .”

The chief and the other company directors had talked about the problems of Echo Hills many times before taking on the development. The unexplained happenings had surely been the work of eco-terrorists: activists who cared more about trees and animals than human progress. Their small-minded tactics cost millions of dollars to companies like his. But the Ridgemont City Planner’s Office disagreed. The mishaps defied explanation. These kinds of events would have taken twice as much manpower, they stated, and every kind of tool and machine possible. Now he stood here and witnessed for himself just why these hills were rumored to be haunted. Never in the reports or the papers, but by the locals, and the older folk who lived on the outskirts of the city. Old timers thought they should just leave that place well enough alone, it wasn’t meant for development. There had been something supernatural about the place for as long as any of them could remember.

How could this have been done without the necessary equipment? Some of these trees were over a hundred feet tall. “You heard nothing? No cranes, no machines leaving the area?” he asked.

“Not a thing. You would have seen the tracks in the dirt, it’s still kinda muddy in places, but do ya see anything? It ain’t human.”

The foreman had been staying onsite in a trailer since they started three days ago, already they were a week behind due to unexpected thunderstorms. The ground at this location had been broken four times before, but the hills didn’t seem the least bit touched when the company arrived. “That second group that started here, didya hear about them? All the builders ran off the site and didn’t come back, said they were attacked by something akin to Killer Bees.”

“Yes, I did read about that,” the chief answered flatly. “They even brought in exterminators to fight the infestation, experts in Africanized Bees. No evidence of a hives. Nothing . . . No bees.”

“Yeah, but I knew a guy who worked that job, his face was covered with tiny little puncture wounds. Said the bugs were striped, but he said they had different lookin’ heads, some were red and some were white. Told me not to take this job, I should’ve listened.”

“That’s ridiculous. There has to be a logical explanation,” the chief sighed.

“I told you when I called, I didn’t hear a thing. When I went to bed, the wood was in piles, but I couldn’t sleep, I felt restless, so I got up to get my other pack of smokes out of my truck and there they were. Couldn’t have been four hours. Ain’t human!”

The two men grew silent, looking at the perfect row of trees. Behind them, a tiny flash of metal shimmered through the faint dawn mist.



“Mavoth, do we deal with those two humans?” The faerie messenger knelt before the warrior Queen, then placed her scythe down as she shook the sawdust